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ABSTRACT

As school districts move toward collaborative school improvement, reform leaders recognize that most school personnel have had little training or experience working within schools on organized decision making teams. Teachers and staff members are being required to negotiate with each other in the process of making organizational decisions--a new responsibility for most of them. This paper proposes a workshop for training such personnel in teambuilding skills. This workshop, which could be conducted by a school counselor, is designed to take place over two half-day sessions, and consists of both didactic and experiential components. Content areas include values and beliefs for collaborative schools, active listening, components of trust, group process skills for consensus decision making, and conflict resolution. Each content area includes experiential activities which enable participants to practice skills. An appendix presents directions for conducting the three exercises contained in the workshop: (1) Self-Disclosure and Active Listening; (2) Paraphrasing, Reflecting, Summarizing; and (3) Conflict Resolution Skill Practice. Contains 10 references. (TS)

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Developing Teambuilding Skills For Collaborative Schools: Using School Counselors as a Resource

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As school districts move toward collaborative school improvement, reform leaders recognize that most school personnel have had little training or experience working within schools on organized decision making teams. Collaborative teaming requires skills, abilities, and conditions. Teachers and staff members are being required to negotiate with each other in the process of making organizational decisions, new responsibilities for most. Additional commitments of time and energy necessitate a motivating environment that encourages involvement. Edwards (1994) notes that communication and problem solving among individuals is critical as they are introduced to new ways of doing things. School counselors, as educators who help others make changes, are communications experts. This paper proposes a workshop for staff training in teambuilding skills that could be conducted by a school counselor.

Counseling programs provide students with theory and practice for developing basic facilitative skills and self understanding. Group process theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Tuckman, 1965) provides a framework for how task groups evolve through predictable stages. These skills and understandings become critical tools for the practices of decision making in restructured schools. Without such skills the implementation of collaborative cultures will be difficult. Kennedy (1990) tells us that traditional strategies of inservice staff development fall short of having impact because many workshops are brief introductions, topics vary from one inservice to the next, and few programs provide follow up assistance to help teachers implement the new learnings. School counselors are school based professionals who can both present material and provide on site follow up and assistance.

This workshop is designed as a combination of both didactic and experiential components. Content areas include values and beliefs for collaborative schools, active listening, components of trust, group process skills for consensus decision making, and conflict resolution. Each content area includes experiential activities which enable participants to practice skills.

The proposed workshop has been adapted from a course team taught by program faculty in educational leadership and counselor education (Berry & Stickel, 1994). The workshop has also been delivered as an inservice training program for a school district in process of implementing site-based decision making. The adaptation reflects topics that would be in the skill and knowledge base of most school counselors.

Time is a significant consideration in staff development planning. Difficulties exist both with collecting entire building staffs together at one time and place, and for finding blocks of time sufficient for meaningful training. Considering these realities, important considerations for staff workshops include drawing on participants' past experience, flexibility in the amount of time needed for each session, and keeping material presented simple and condensed. The Teambuilding Workshop could be presented in two half day sessions or a whole day session, or modified into a series of one hour blocks suitable for before or after school meetings. This paper will consider the workshop as two half day sessions.

Session One: Trust Building and Active Listening

Building sufficient trust to tackle the increased responsibility building staffs will encounter as decision making becomes site-based will be critical to effective reform. Such trust building is complicated and will obviously not result from a series of simple exercises. However, increasing levels of self

disclosure and utilization of effective communications skills help to break down isolation and allow information and opinions to be exchanged more clearly and efficiently.

The workshop would begin with the counselor facilitating an exercise allowing participants to construct the group's vision of an ideal school. Individually each participant would list characteristics of his or her vision of the ideal school. In small groups these personal visions would be shared and a group consensus then reported to the larger group. The counselor would write these on the board or newsprint and through discussion finalize a list of the group's vision of the ideal school. This list would be saved for use in a subsequent exercise.

Active listening skills would be practiced in three exercises with emphasis on debriefing each exercise. Most educators, have had experience with exercises aimed at such skill development and the counselor using group facilitative skills will both model communications skills and direct discussion to how such skills will be used specifically as components of collaborative decision making.

Exercise One: Self Disclosure and Active Listening (Appendix) helps participants experience the process of listening intently and subsequently discussing their communication style. The intent of this exercise is to discuss the communications process into it's simplest components of sending and receiving a message. Self disclosing a working communication style will help participants to build a foundation of understanding of self and others that will be used as decisions are discussed in working groups.

Paraphrasing, reflecting, and summarizing are skills adapted from the basic listening sequence (Ivey, 1994). The counselor will present a mini-lecture explaining each skill and the process of giving and receiving

feedback. Exercise Two: Paraphrasing, Reflecting, and Summarizing (Appendix) will follow with participants both practicing the skill and giving feedback concerning effectiveness.

Conflict is inevitable in collaborative decision making. However for collaborative decision making to gain a foothold in schools, conflict must be handled constructively. Exercise Three: Conflict Resolution Skill Practice (Appendix) involves practice in resolving an interpersonal conflict using active listening skills. The counselor will facilitate the exercise with an emphasis on debriefing.

Session Two: Group Theory and Skills

The outcome of this session will be understanding of roles in task groups and stages of group development, and practice using consensus decision making. The session can be introduced by having participants individually rank the visions of the ideal school developed in the first session. Small groups will be instructed to then come to a group ranking of the visions using their perception of consensus decision making. A discussion of the group process in each of the small groups will serve as a springboard to content presented in the next segment.

The counselor will present a mini-lecture covering group process and group roles. Tuckman's (1965) model of group stages should be part of this information in order to give participants an appreciation of the stages of development necessary before a task group achieves a "working" stage. A widely used model (Napier & Gershenfeld, 1985) that includes task roles, maintenance roles, and anti-group roles will be introduced. A short exercise should follow which allows participants to both experience and observe the roles.

Decision-making models such as individual, small group, majority, and consensus, are presented next. Participants should discuss advantages and disadvantages of each model in terms of building level decision making. Discussion will progress to the advantages of consensus decision making for decisions that affect an entire building. These advantages include, for example, efficient use of resources, commitment to implementation, and quality of decisions (Johnson & Johnson, 1994)

Practice using consensus decisionmaking will follow and many exercises are appropriate and available. Wilderness survival exercises such as Stranded in the Desert (Johnson & Johnson, 1994) are popular and are sufficiently removed from daily experiences to allow greater focus on process as opposed to content. Ample time is needed for the exercise so that the process can fully develop. Particular attention in the debriefing should focus on identifying how various roles helped and hindered decision making. Participants should be more aware of how they function as a group member and have greater skill in identifying roles and the purpose these roles serve in task groups.

Follow-up

Counselors can help in follow-up of the training through serving as a building level resource for questions and concerns that arise following the training. Staffs implementing a consensus decision making model can use counselors as process observers in meetings. Groups can work more efficiently by having feedback on process issues. As others become more comfortable, this role could be rotated.

Discussion

Our thinking about organizations is changing. Wheatley (1992) noted that in motivation theory, our attention is shifting from the enticement of

external rewards to intrinsic motivators springing from the work itself and as we let go of machine models of work we must see ourselves in new ways. Senge (1990) points out it is imperative that systems create structures for working together in order to create conditions for improving learning. School counselors are being encouraged by their professional organizations to use their highly unique skills to assist with school restructuring (Burgess & Dedmond, 1994; Humphrey, 1993). Graduate programs in counseling emphasize the development of facilitative skills and awareness of self in relation to others, critical skills for collaborative schools. A goal of this workshop is to provide an outline for an inservice program that most school counselors could conduct in their schools. A staff training role may be new to many counselors and other similarly skilled teachers. School administrators will need to provide an impetus to this collaboration by requesting the workshop. Administators must support the continuing skill development and practice that would be available through using trained resources that are already part of the school staff.

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Exercise One

Self Disclosure and Active Listening

Participants will practice basic elements of speaking, listening, giving feedback, and communicating about self in a working setting.

Directions:

1. Divide into groups of three.

2. Members of each triad assign themselves the letter **A, B,** or **C**. Member **A** will initially serve as *Speaker*, Member **B** as *Listener*, and **C** as *Judge*.

3. **A** will briefly present (3-5 minutes maximum) to persons **B** and **C** a description of those things about him or her which another person would need to know in order to understand his/her communication style in a working group.

4. At the end of the 3-5 minute period, person **B** who has been listener provides a verbal summary of the main points of person **A**'s explanation.

5. The summary must satisfy both person **C** who judges the accuracy and adequacy of **B**'s listening and summarization, and person **A**.

6. After having satisfied persons **A** and **C**, person **B** moves into the role of *speaker* and explains their communication style to **A** (who is now the *judge*) and **C** (who is now the *listener*).

7. The process then repeats until everyone has served in all three roles.

Discussion Questions

What was the nature of each of the three roles?
Did rules and structure help facilitate or hinder the process?
What was easy or difficult about each of the three roles?
Which parts of the exercise and it's outcomes could be useful in professional communication situations?

Exercise Two

Paraphrasing, Reflecting, Summarizing

This exercise will focus on making the listening active (Active Listening) by adding the skills of Paraphrasing, Reflecting, Summarizing.

Directions:

1. Use groups of 3. Member **A** will initially serve as ***Speaker***, Member B as ***Listener***, and C as ***Observer***

2. **A** will choose a topic from the list below. Choose a topic and think about it briefly so that you won't run out of things to say. Talk in a straightforward manner without rambling or going too fast. Pause occasionally to let **B** respond. Formally close the conversation (e.g. I guess that's it) and request a summary (What did you make of that...) if the listener doesn't provide one.

Topics:

* A problem that you haven't solved yet
* A decision that you are in the process of making
* A situation that you find very challenging
* A current project that went very well for you

4. Person **B** as listener will listen and respond paraphrasing/reflecting/summarizing using the following guidelines:

*Respond 5-7 times (more is better for practice)

*Use sentence stems to help e.g. "Sounds like you..... " You feel ..... when....." "In other words ....."

*Don't ask questions, advise or reassure or say anything from your frame of reference e.g. "If I were you...." "I know just how you feel...." "The same think happened to me."

*End the session with a summary. "I heard you say....." Is that on target?"

5. Person **C** will time the practice, record the accuracy and adequacy of B's responses and provide feedback at the end of the session

6. The process then repeats until everyone has served in all three roles.

Exercise Three

Conflict Resolution Skill Practice

This activity gives you a chance to practice using the active listening skills to defuse conflict

Directions: Form groups of two and decide who is to be the **skilled person** and the **unskilled person**

*If you are the **skilled person** pick one of the topics below to use for discussion.

*Begin the discussion between the skilled and unskilled person and **let it build to an argument:** after 1 or 2 minutes the **skilled person** will make the decision to use the skills of conflict resolution.

*After about 5 minutes total stop the discussion and debrief:

How was the understanding of opposing points of view?
Could areas of disagreement/agreement be defined?
How was the level of emotionality - Was it under control?
How did using the skills help or hinder the process of resolving the conflict?.

*Switch roles for a second round.
*If time join with another group of two and continue debriefing

Topics:

I think tenure for teachers should be eliminated
I believe in school prayer
I think drug testing for teachers is a good idea
I support school vouchers
I believe teacher unions are bad for education